

ARIZONA VETERANS' SERVICE ADVISORY COMMISSION
4141 N. Third Street –Phoenix, AZ 85012
Thursday – November 10, 2005

M I N U T E S

Call to Order - The meeting was called to order at 10:02 a.m. by Chairman Ellis.

Members Present

Advisory Commission Members

Webb Ellis, Chairperson
Robert Boyd
Tom Dingwall
Linda Fulkerson
Mary Ellen Piotrowski
Kenneth Yamanouchi

Arizona Department of Veterans' Services

Patrick F. Chorpenning, Director
Gabe Forsberg, Strategic Planner
Lee Borgen, Veterans Benefit Counselor II
Vanita Parker
Dorelia Brooks

Members Absent

Phillip Quochoytewa
Larry Brown – see note below under Communications

Guests – Ray Thomas from the Veterans of Foreign Wars was in attendance.

Approval of Minutes - Minutes of the October 13, 2005 meeting were approved as written.

Communications

Commissioner Larry Brown has recently had medical problems that interfere with his ability to serve as an Advisory Commissioner. Chairman Ellis accepted his resignation by email recently and expressed his appreciation for his service to the Commission. Chairman Ellis will send a letter to Director Chorpenning regarding the newly created vacancy.

Gabe Forsberg recapped the November 2, 2005 letter to Arizona gaming tribes that was included in the meeting packets. It expressed support for the Arizona Veterans Museum (to be located in a renovated building on Indian School property).

Agency Announcements and Updates

All veterans service organizations will be asked to submit candidates to fill two vacancies on the Advisory Commission early next week. Director Chorpenning will meet with Congressman Renzi in his D.C. office in December. The purpose of his meeting is to discuss several issues of importance to Arizona veterans, including the need for land to be used as a cemetery in northern Arizona and the Bob Stump Arizona Veterans Museum.

Legislation

Director Chorpenning has worked with lawmakers to deal with several bills.

1. There is some proposed “clean up” for agency statutes.
 - One change is to provide statutory authority for purposes of acquiring property to benefit Arizona’s network of military installations. The requirement is due to the newly established Military Installation Fund and will increase the statutory authority the agency now has for purposes of establishing state veteran cemeteries.

- Increase the maximum amount of conservator fees that may be charged by the Fiduciary Division for its clients. There may be a Proposition 200 hearing required, since that fee may be considered a form of "tax." Representative John Nelson suggested that the agency request additional general funds rather than increasing the client fees.
2. Specialty license plates to show patriotism and support of the military and veterans – featuring a red, white and blue design. The specialty plate would allow any citizen to purchase a plate and generate a substantial amount of money to support issues of importance to the veteran community. There will be an initial investment of \$35,000 to initiate the specialty plate.
 - Motorcycle plates just became available in August and they are selling about 400 per month. If that trend continues, there will be an additional \$11,000 per month over the previous year's revenues.
 3. Shortly after Governor Hull made the agency a department, Director Chorpenning asked the Director of Revenue about adding a check-off on the state income tax to allow tax payers to give money to the Veterans' Donation Fund. He was told that Revenue had no problems in making the change, but the agency would need to pay \$1 million to redesign tax forms. The issue will be brought up again.
 4. Two years ago, a bill was introduced to allow National Guard personnel who have received a Purple Heart to attend a state-supported school at no cost. At that time, there were only two qualifying individuals. Presently, there are 58 Purple Heart recipients from the Army National Guard alone. The proposed change to the law intends to (1) limit the benefit to those service personnel who are eligible for GI Montgomery Bill and (2) expand the benefit to all Purple Heart recipients in active duty and the Reserves.

Veterans Task Force

The Veterans Task Force (VTF) is comprised of individuals who are not considered part of the traditional veteran community. In order to weave in the concerns from veterans service organizations, Director Chorpenning established the Arizona Veterans' Council under statutory authority. He established the Council comprised of the Commanders, past Commanders, the Commanders next in line to serve, and the Adjutants for the following organizations: the American Legion; Veterans of Foreign Wars; Disabled American Veterans; and the Purple Heart. Additional representation has been added to include the Vietnam Veterans of America, Paralyzed Veterans of America and the Advisory Commission (Chairman Ellis has attended two of these meetings to date).

The VTF has an incredibly short period of time to identify recommendations it is required to present to the Governor and the Legislature in January 2006. Draft recommendations will be sent out to the VTF members today. Recommendations range from \$10 million to fund the construction of a state veteran home in Tucson to additional Veterans Benefits Counselors. Other recommendations include One-Stop Veterans Centers (5 events each year to provide outreach to veterans statewide), adequately funding the cemetery program, replenishing funds in a special cemetery fund so that a cemetery can be built in northern Arizona can be built, and memorials that inform the US Congress about inequities in how Arizona National Guard and Reservists are treated. These concepts were extracted from minutes and conversations and additional recommendations are being requested from the VTF members.

The next Veterans Task Force meeting will be held on November 30, 2005 at the Governor's 2nd Floor Conference Room at 1700 W. Washington at 1:00 p.m. The focus of that meeting will be on reviewing the recommendations which will become the final work product from this group. The last meeting will be held December 15, 2005 and the published recommendations will be presented to the Governor and to the Legislature in January 2006.

Chairman Ellis asked if the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services is organized in such a way that we can adequately disseminate public information. Director Chorpenning indicated that most agencies have a public information officer and his agency does not. The agency has a multitude of very complex and unique responsibilities with very few employees to accomplish its statutory requirements. Director Chorpenning indicated that he was focused on the addition of Veterans Benefits Counselors at this time because he believes there may be the political will to increase their number. The support staff required to support the additional VBCs and/or vacancy savings may need to include funds for public relations.

Commissioner Dingwall agreed that the most important step for the agency at this time is to add to the number of professional counselors available to our veterans. He reminded the Commission that the federal dollars generated by veterans who receive disability and other benefits have a positive effect on the individual legislative districts.

Lee Borgen, VBC from Lake Havasu, offered that many of the veterans she has spoken to are hesitant to apply for disability because of a gross misunderstanding. Many disabled veterans believe that if they receive benefits, it would somehow reduce the amount of money available to "more deserving" individuals returning from the OEF/OIF (such as tri-plegics). Her statement emphasizes the need to educate veterans on their benefits.

OEF/OIF (Operation Enduring Freedom/ Operation Iraqi Freedom) Steering Committee

Webb Ellis discussed information that was distributed at the November 8 OEF/OIF meeting. The information packet was emailed to the Commissioners the evening after the meeting and copies of the information were available in the meeting packets.

At the end of the OEF/OIF Steering Committee packet of information is a lengthy Memorandum of Understanding. It is critical that the Advisory Commissioners understand this draft recommendation because there are certain responsibilities assigned to the Commission in the agreement. The Commission is responsible for reviewing the document and to be prepared to discuss it at the December meeting. The deadline to get comments in to the OEF/OIF Steering Committee is 1/1/06.

Chairman Ellis indicated that there were two individuals available from TriWest at the last OEF/OIF meeting. One of the representatives was responsible for coordinating Reserve and National Guard personnel for 21 states. He was very appreciative of the efforts of this steering committee to ensure that service personnel are provided with the benefits they have earned.

Director Chorpenning indicated that the entire effort has been the brain child of Jon Skelly, Assistant Director of the VA Regional Office in Phoenix. The agreement was based on a memo of understanding (MOU) that was prepared by his counterpart in the state of Washington. The Washington MOU focuses upon behavioral health (the director was a social worker before heading the department of veteran's affairs there).

Open Discussion / For the Good of the Order

Update of Yuma Stand Down

Commissioner Fulkerson will be meeting November 19 with representatives who will play key roles in the Yuma Stand Down. March is the tentative Stand Down date. She is taking an advisory role and has been able to put several individuals in contact with one another. The entire Commission applauded her efforts in coordinating the effort as they establish their own Stand Down for homeless veterans in the area.

Update of Safford Meeting

Chairman Ellis wanted to schedule a “pre-Regional” meeting where the Commission could obtain additional information about American Indian veterans. For planning purposes, Commissioners should plan on leaving early on Friday, February 10. Chairman Ellis will coordinate with Commissioner Quochoyewa to determine where the meeting may be held.

Vice Chairman Piotrowski announced that she was given 11 Veterans Registration forms at the American Legion Fall Conference. All of the registrations were from Show Low, so she knows that the Regional Meeting held there in September was successful.

Follow up on the question about property tax exemptions: Director Chorpenning pledged to find the legislation and provide it to the Advisory Commission.

Update of Arizona Veterans Hall of Fame

Chairman Ellis wanted to commend Vice Chair Piotrowski (who also chairs Unified Arizona Veterans) and Director Chorpenning for a tremendous job at the Arizona Veterans Hall of Fame. The program has become very successful. A question was raised about what becomes of the Governor's Proclamation. Vanita Parker has originals that will be mailed out to the recipients with their photographs receiving their medallions and plaques.

This year, there is a book available that includes photographs and biographies of all Arizona Hall of Fame recipients. The idea came from Frank Schmuck, a recipient himself, and Donna Adams compiled the information over the past few months. The cost of the book is \$20 and proceeds of book sales go to the Arizona Hall of Fame.

Arizona Veterans' Museum

Joan Sisco was unable to attend, but reported that she has established a fund for purposes of accepting donations for renovating the Indian School building that will serve as the Arizona Veterans Museum.

Various

On November 21, an event will be held to honor veterans with a focus on Latino veterans. The Governor will be in attendance and Director Chorpenning wanted to extend an invitation to the Advisory Commissioners.

Commissioner Boyd announced that on December 4, a motorcycle “Toys for Tots” drive will be held. He will provide details of this and other events on the website as www.azdvs.gov.

Commissioner Dingwall participated in a casualty interment in southern Arizona recently. A US Army soldier stationed in the Philippines was killed and was buried in Sierra Vista. The casualty officer assigned to work with the family was extremely complimentary of the service provided at the Southern Arizona Veterans Memorial Cemetery. The employees of the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services did a stellar job and Commissioner Dingwall wanted to pass along the compliments from the casualty officer.

Certificates were given to Commissioners Fulkerson and Yamanouchi that acknowledged their completion of the Board and Commission training required by the Governor's Office.

Adjournment – Meeting adjourned at 11:38 p.m. by acclamation. Next meeting will be held on December 15, 2005 at the Arizona Veteran Home in Phoenix.